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SUBJECT: CANADA IN AFGHANISTAN: SOME PROGRESS, WITH STEPS BACKWARD

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¶1. (SBU) Summary. In its sixth quarterly report to Parliament on Canada's engagement in Afghanistan, the government cited slight progress - mostly on school construction, micro-finance, and polio eradication -- in its efforts in Kandahar Province. Training and mentoring of Afghan Security Forces - both army and police - continues, with mixed results. Signature development projects move forward, and border security dialogue between Afghanistan and Pakistan is expanding, with Canadian facilitation. The media and Parliament, however, remain more obsessed with allegations that the government ignored credible reports of abuse of Afghan detainees transferred by the Canadian Forces in 2006 to Afghan authorities (ref c), and largely ignored the mostly discouraging news in this latest report. End summary.

¶2. (U) Minister of International Trade and Chair of the Cabinet Committee on Afghanistan Stockwell Day on December 10 released the sixth quarterly report to Parliament - mandated under a March 2008 bipartisan motion that also extended the mandate of the Canadian Forces in Afghanistan until the end of 2011 -- on Canada's engagement in Afghanistan. Covering the period from July 1 to September 30, the report painted an often discouraging picture for the work of Canadian military and civilian units operating in and around Kandahar. The report recognized that the widespread fraud that characterized the Presidential election had raised questions of credibility regarding the Karzai government, but praised the willingness of the Afghan people to vote in the face of intimidation as well as the efforts of Afghan security forces to provide security. The report noted that Canada had achieved progress toward "many" of its priority objectives in the province.

¶3. (U) The report, however, also highlighted that the quarter had witnessed the "heaviest loss of life among the greatly expanded coalition forces for any three-month period since 2001," including eleven members of the Canadian Forces. The report admitted that "the insurgents have seized the initiative, both in armed conflict and by creating a crisis of confidence among the populace through the equally important 'silent war' of fear, intimidation and persuasion." It noted that August was also the "deadliest month so far this year for Afghan civilian casualties." The report welcomed that the August recommendations from General Stanley McChrystal, Commander of the International Security Assistance Force (COMISAF), had in many ways reflected the approach already underway by Canadian Forces, notably, the "Village Approach" exemplified by Operation Kantolo, which aims to protect the population and create a secure environment in which governance and development can take root.

Key Findings of the Report

Priority One: Training and Mentoring ANSF

¶4. (U) The Canadian objective for 2011 is for the Afghan National Army (ANA) to demonstrate an "increased capacity" to conduct operations and sustain a more secure environment in key districts of Kandahar Province, and for four kandaks (battalions) to be fully capable of planning, executing, and sustaining near-autonomous operations.. As of this quarter, however, only one of six kandaks is "fully capable" -- unchanged from previous quarter, although there is also a new kandak that has not undergone assessment. Only one of the six kandaks or the ANA headquarters has an effective strength of 70% or higher -- down from three kandaks at that level last quarter. The report contended that the ANA nonetheless had succeeded in shouldering greater responsibility for security in Kandahar City and by independently executing 80% of security operations on its own, as well as by leading more than 70%. This exceeded the 65% goal for 2011, and is up from 45% for the June 2008 baseline period. (This was a benchmark that the government had added only in the previous report.) However, in contrast to the previous quarter when the ANA had an approval rating of 85% or more in five out of six key districts, this was true in only one key district during this quarter. Similarly, in this quarter,

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there were no key districts in which the majority of Kandaharis perceived security as improving, whereas there had been one in the previous quarter.

¶5. (U) The Afghan National Police (ANP) performed well during the elections, according to the report, providing security at polling stations and assisting the Independent Election Commission (IEC) in moving and securing elections materials. Canadian military and civilian police in Kandahar City provided basic training for 679 ANP officers in preparation for the election, up from only 200 in the previous quarter (although the report failed to report on the total percentage of ANP in Kandahar with such training, unlike in the previous report). There was progress toward the 2011 goal of having 80 % of the ANP units capable of planning and executing near-autonomous operations. Two (of 17) ANP units representing 12% of the officers were assessed as capable of conducting basic law and order operations with occasional assistance from international advisors or police mentor team (Capability Milestone 2), up from one in the last quarter.

Priority Two: Strengthening Afghan Capacity to Deliver Core Services

¶6. (U) The report noted that the ability of the Afghan Government to provide dependable basic services such as education, healthcare, sanitation, roads, and water is a key test of its ability to gain public confidence. Two of Canada's "signature projects" are designed to reinforce the Afghan Government's institutional capacity to deliver these services. Toward the 2011 goal of building, expanding, or repairing 50 schools in key districts, construction was completed during the quarter on seven schools, up from zero during the last reporting period. Twenty-one schools are currently under construction; no new school projects began this quarter. This quarter, 13,500 individuals continued in various literacy training programs, identical with the previous quarter.

¶7. (U) Another 2011 goal for Afghan institutions is to have completed infrastructure projects undertaken by locally elected bodies in 75% of communities in key districts. The report cited completed projects in 68% of key districts, up from 66% last quarter. Canadian engineers made progress on technical aspects of

another "signature project," the C\$50 million rehabilitation of the Dahla Dam. When completed, this dam and irrigation system will ensure reliable water delivery to four out of five Kandaharis and support licit agriculture. A manufacturer for the gates and weirs of the associated irrigation system was identified. The project created 157 new seasonal jobs for a cumulative total of 355 (versus 199 last quarter), against a 2011 target of 10,000. In this quarter, Kandahar already achieved Canada's 2011 target of loans for 500 clients through the Microfinance Investment Support Facility (against a March 2008 baseline of 30 microfinance loans).

18. (U) The report recognized that insurgent activity in Kandahar nonetheless continued to hamper the efforts of both the international community and Afghan Government to provide basic services, however. Development partners can travel in key districts only in armored vehicles with military escort. In other areas, movement is not possible. While 60% of Kandaharis were satisfied with the Afghan government's efforts to improve the quality of life, this was a decline from 75% in the last quarter. However, the percent of Kandaharis satisfied with the provision of education grew from 44% to 47%, and those satisfied with employment increased from 25% to 40% in this quarter. However, about 30 pct had a favorable opinion of the Taliban, a "modest but steady upward trend."

Priority Three: Providing Humanitarian Assistance to Vulnerable People

19. (U) Canada's 2011 the goal is that humanitarian assistance will be accessible to Afghan refugees and internally displaced persons in Kandahar and nationwide. According to this report,

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Canada's third "signature project" -- a campaign designed to eradicate polio throughout Afghanistan in 2009, in partnership with the World Health Organization and UNICEF -- inoculated another 380,000 children in Kandahar and another 880,000 nationwide. The report admitted, however, that it will not be possible to eradicate the disease in Afghanistan as projected by the end of 2009, and that there were nine new cases in the quarter, with a nationwide total of 22 new cases. Canadian funding helped the World Food Programme to double its food aid from last quarter, reaching an additional 1.5 million beneficiaries. Removal of landmines and explosives cleared land in 11 villages (an additional 0.25 square kilometers of land) during this period, bring the number of mine-related civilian casualties to fewer than 50 per month, a 10 year low. Estimates are that at least 10,000 explosive hazards remain, however, scattered across more than 1000 square miles of Kandahar Province.

Priority Four: Enhancing Border Security and Facilitating Bilateral Dialogue Between Afghanistan and Pakistan

10. (U) Canada's goal for 2011 is that Afghan and Pakistani institutions will exercise "stronger capacity" to control the border. The quarterly report cited two Joint Working Group meetings under the Canadian-facilitated Dubai Process, which brought together Afghan and Pakistani officials to identify projects that would contribute to efforts in counter narcotics and controlling the movement of people. (Two additional meetings on customs and law enforcement took place after the end of this reporting period.) Canadian-facilitated discussions also took place along the Kandahar-Baluchistan border between Afghan and Pakistani military officers. These Dubai Process meetings have created a regular mechanism for advancing border cooperation.

Priority Five: Advancing Afghan Democratic Institutions

¶11. (U) Canada's hope for 2011 is that national, local and provincial institutions in Kandahar will exhibit an "increasing capacity" for democratic governance. Although the report recognized the major concerns about irregularities and fraud related to the Presidential election, it praised the work of the Independent Electoral Commission and the Elections Complaints Commission as examples of emerging capacity. It admitted, however, that voter turnout was less than 40% in the elections. Training for officials from Kandahar and 21 other provinces began during last reporting period and continued in this quarter in preparation for the establishment of long-term provincial strategic plans to build capacity in conjunction with the Afghan National Development Strategy.

Priority Six: Facilitating Afghan-led Efforts toward Reconciliation

¶12. (U) The report noted "no further results" on national reconciliation, which will depend on the "will of the Afghan people." Canada agreed to provide C\$1.6 million to rebuild the meeting hall of the Kandahar Provincial Council, providing space for community gatherings.

Reaction in Canada

¶13. (SBU) While the media covered the December 10 release by Minister Day, virtually all of the questioning related instead to the on-going controversy over the treatment of prisoners handed over to Afghan security forces by Canadian soldiers and what the government knew when (ref c). Minister Day, and -- in a separate press conference -- Justice Minister Rob Nicholson insisted that the government would not comply with a December 9 House of Commons motion (which the ruling Conservatives lost 145-143) demanding full release of all relevant documents to the Commons. Minister Day cited operational security, while Minister Nicholson cited legal restrictions; both suggested individuals (including MPs) who wanted

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access to such restricted documents would have to seek them in court. The three opposition parties are united in seeking to embarrass the government over this issue and have vowed to call into session the Special Committee on Afghanistan even during the holiday recess (which began December 10), but have indicated no interest in debating the actual Canadian mission in Afghanistan and the successes - or failures - of Canada's role as documented in the quarterly reports. As noted in one editorial, the public similarly has a "curiosity" deficit when it comes to Afghanistan nowadays.

JACOBSON